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Following a congressional hearing on illegal guns in Washington, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, is calling for federal action to combat the rise of illegal gun trafficking in the Chicago region.

Kirk said Friday that federal gun laws have two key weaknesses -- the ease with which people on the FBI's terrorist watch list are able to purchase guns and the "gun show loophole," in which unlicensed individual gun sellers and "occasional sellers" are not required to perform background checks on gun purchasers.

Kirk also said federal laws do not help in the tracing of many guns that eventually are used in crimes.

"Nothing tears a community apart more than gun violence," Kirk said. "Last year, the ATF recovered more than 160 guns from criminal investigations in the northern suburbs. By reforming gun shows, stopping 'fire sales,' and blocking straw gun purchasers, we can make it much more difficult for criminals to get guns.

Kirk was joined in a news conference Friday by Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Special Agent-in-Charge Andy Traver and representatives of the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence.

Kirk is co-chairman of the Congressional Task Force for Mayors Against Illegal Guns, a group organized by several major metropolitan mayors, including Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. The organization released a major report on illegal guns this week.

According to Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 1 percent of firearm dealers account for 57 percent of gun traces. Four gun shops in Mississippi supply much of the illegal weapons seized in the Chicago area according to the ATF. More than 300 Chicago- area crime guns were traced to

those dealers.

Kirk is asking Congress to reduce the spread of illegal guns by closing the gun show loophole, requiring gun dealers to perform criminal background checks on all gun-handling employees, banning dealers whose licenses have been revoked from continuing to sell their inventory without conducting background checks and closing the "terror gap" that leaves those on the terrorist no-fly list off the list of prohibited purchasers of firearms.

The Congressional Task Force Against Illegal Guns currently is drafting legislation to implement the recommendations of Mayors Against Illegal Guns